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'ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE CITY'

Sounds like a Fairy Tale, but its all true. The Bible starts 'In The Beginning'. So that's where I'll start. I can't remember what I had for supper yesterday, but my long term memory is great. I'm almost eighty two now. We were coming back from Georgia and I was probably standing behind my mothers arm (seat belts or car seats weren't even heard of yet). I remember my father getting gas and my mother gave him a pan or something full of fudge for the car. We probably didn't have any money. My mother always could make fudge. Peppy was born in Georgia and we were coming back. I said I was two but I could have been three. All of our relatives lived in the south. We finally settled on Newkirk Street. It used to be called Fourteenth Street. I was born on Thirteenth Street. It's now called Macon Street. Junior was born on Twelfth Street. It is now Lehigh Street. Strange isn't it, 12th, 13th and 14th Streets. Anyway, out in the middle of nowhere, on Newkirk Street, about a block from the old Firehouse there were seven houses all together. (Row houses). We lived about a year, I think in the fourth house and then we moved to the corner house towards the Firehouse. The old Firehouse is still there today. By this time I was probably five or six. From the time I was around two till I was fifteen my name was Brother Martin. I guess my parents would probably say to Junior, save some for your brother and I guess everybody picked up on Brother. At that time my mother was healthy and my father could still work. During the first world war many of the soldiers contacted Influenza or the Flu. My father ended up with T.B. and then my mother got it. I have to give you the highlights on the neighborhood. Like I said Junoir was probably six, I was five and Pep about three or three and a half. Then Eddy was born. Being a kid I couldn't figure out why with Eddy, Helen and Ray, she would always be sick in bed. Back in those days you would be in bed about a week to ten days after having a baby. The thing I always remember, is my father took us towards the Firehouse to see a streetcar thas was almost cut in half by a train. I don't know what the casualty rate was. On the way back to our house a car hit and killed the little boy that was with us. I remember how sad everybody was. At that time my mother had four boys.

It's now 1932, and the Lindbergh baby was kidnapped and killed. A man named Bruno Haufman was captured and we lived in deadly fear that someone would come up a ladder and take us away and kill us. My father was off work for a long time with a broken leg, and for a while he drove a street car. But then he got real sick for a long time. From there we moved to Nobel Street in Highlandtown. I remember I was seven because everybody could drink beer because Prohibition ended. Not too much happened there. Then we moved to Leverton Avenue. We lived about half a block from the pig pen just down the street. All of us kids would go and ride the pigs all the time. Brothers Bobby, Donald, me and Junior, Pep, Marvin Wells and Freddy the Wop and Polock, no disrespect, that's what everybody called them. Leverton Avenue was probably the ideal place for boys to grow. My mind probably wandered a little, but, when we left Fourteenth Street (Newkirk Street) we moved to Gracelyn Park in Dundalk. That's where Helen was born. We had a sister. My father would take us down Dundalk Avenue to Logan Field and watch the planes come and go. It's now called Logan Village. Meanwhile, back on Leverton Avenue, I think I was nine now. Whenever the sun was beating down in July and August we would dig the tar out of the cracks in the street and chew and spit tobacco juice. Somebody told us it made your teeth white and then we would find snowball sticks in the gutters and stick them together and make helicopters out of them. Like I said, it was a great place to grow up. We would cut rubber bands out of old inner tubes and make 'rubberband guns' out of them. We would kick coal off the trains that were sitting and then pick it up in baskets and sell it for ten cents a half bushell. When we made ten cents we would go to the Aldine Movie on Baltimore Street about a block and a half away. It opened at noon and we would stay till dark. We were boys and this is what boys did back then. When we came out of the movie, we had a headache from sitting in the front row, staring up at the screen. Then out front we would wait for grown ups to throw their cigarette butts in the gutter and we would grab them up and smoke till we fell out. We would save four or five in our own little boxes. Back then fireworks were legal and around the fourth of July we would walk out around Cross & Blackwell past City Hospital (Bayview) to the 'Baltimore Fire Works Company'. None of us ever had over thirty cents to spend and usually we blew them all up before we



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got back.

I was still ten when our father died. I could build the best wagon around. Just before my father died he told me to put a sliding bolt on the back door and I did it. We had a little tool box. Just minor stuff. What would happen in those days; everybody had an Ice Box and you had to empty the pan under the bottom. Sometimes we would forget, and the pan would run over in the kitchen. I went down the cellar and measured where the pipe was under the Ice Box and cut a hole through the floor. I shoved a hose up through the floor and on to the pipe. I ran the hose over to the plug in the cellar. It was a sewer pipe. The hose was long but I thought it should be shorter, so I shoved it down in the sewer pipe further. My mother praised me and everything was great. No more emptying the drain pipe. I don't remember if it was three days or three weeks, but we all started feeling bad and getting sick. We soon realized that sewer gas was backing up into the icebox. My plumbing days were over for a while. I was ten and I should have known better. If I had left the long hose lay on the dirt cellar floor and then put it in the sewer pipe I would have had a natural trap and everything would have worked. A lot happened on 'Leverton'. My brother was fighting with 'Freddy the wop' and the guy was biting him in the side and Junior was screaming. I had to do something - Freddy was twice as big. I picked up a flattened Pet milk can and threw it hard as I could. It hit Freddy in the left eye. When he let go he was bleeding like a fountain. Anyway, all three of us ended up in juvenile court. I know I had to walk all the way downtown every Saturday and sign in. I guess I was on probation. If I wasn't trying to protect my brother I would probably have been sent to St. Mary's Industrial School till I was twenty one. That's where they sent bad boys then.

Pan

Like I said, if I had a chip instead of a brain I wouldn't have to hop around. I know I'm repeating that we never knew we were poor. In those days we had snow all winter. It probably didn't snow anymore than it does now. They probably didn't know that salt would get rid of snow on the streets. If no one worked in your family, you walked everywhere. If you had a dime you could ride the bus or streetcar. If someone was lucky enough to have a car you were almost rich. If you had a car and it snowed and you were rich you could buy special snow tires. They had deep threads and some had rubber knobs all around them. They were called knobbies. If you couldn't afford them and you were working you could buy chains that went all around your tire. If you couldn't buy full chains you could buy strap chains and put about three on each rear wheel. But, as you drove with the full chains and you would drive any length of time the chain links would break and the broken ends would bang and bang and eventually knock a big hole in the fender. You could hear them coming for blocks away. Getting back to the snow tires, when the streets cleared of snow you couldn't keep driving on them or they wouldn't last too long. You had to go down the cellar and get your regular tires out and jack the car up and pull the wheels and break down the tires and put your regular tires on being careful not to puncture the inner tubes. Then you would take your hand pump and put about 30 lbs of air in them. All cars were two wheel drive, all wheel drive, front wheel drive. Radial tires that are regular and snow combination tires, have locking rears and limited slip differentials. Now, they have lots of plows and first they salt the streets. Back then, there were a lot less cars. Today there are many million of cars to beat the snow away. But, as kids we prayed for snow. We would take our shovels and walk all day and clean sidewalks. Most people cleaned their own. But, some houses had these old people about thirty to forty years old. Regular front sidewalks, we would charge ten cents and corner houses we would get twenty cents. At the end of the day we would make about a dollar or two. All candy was a penny and snowballs were two cents. Three cents for chocolate and a nickle if they put marshmallow on them. We ate a lot of macaroni and spaghetti. We would put white margarine and jelly on our sandwiches and sometime we would get apple butter. It was cheap.

We would listen to the radio on Saturday night and hear Gangbusters and The Little Theatre off Time Square. In our family we would heat buckets of water on the kitchen coal stove and carry it to the bathtub upstairs. The bathtub only had one faucet and it only had cold water. With the bathtub full my mother would wash Ray and then Helen. When they were put in bed us boys would get in two at a time and run for the beds when we finished because even during the winter time there wasn't



any heat upstairs. We would heat water in bottles and put them at the bottom of the bed and all four of us would get close and get warm. It sounded like the Waltons. Good night Mom - Good night Brother - Good night Helen - Good night Brother - Good night Pep - Good night brother. It took about twenty minutes for everybody to say good night to everybody. As far as I knew everybody did that. We thought we were rich because we knew in the morning we would get up to hot oatmeal. I never knew any other cereal. Once in a blue moon we would get Corn Flakes. I don't ever remember stuff like steak and pork chops. The first steak I ever had in my life was when we came back from overseas from 'The Big War'. Oh yes, I served forty one months in the army but that's another story. One time when my father was alive he bought something called tripe. My mother cooked it and we tried to eat it. My father noticed Pep was choking and turning blue, he grabbed him and with his fingers he went down his throat and pulled the tripe out. He gathered it all up and threw it out. I remember him saying, we'll never have that again. I was about nine but I never forgot it. The next time you go food shopping take a look and see what tripe looks like. Marge always says 'come on forget that stuff'. My father was only trying his best. He had been sick for about a year. Sad, isn't it?

One of the all time favorite things we would do was to go to Patterson Park Avenue and watch for the busses to stop. We would hop on back with our feet sideways on the little bumpers and our fingers in the top rain gutters and ride all the way downtown across the Orleans Street viaduct. Then, we would hop one coming back to Highlandtown. It's a wonder we weren't killed. Of course, my mother never knew this. I told you about us four sleeping in the same bed in the back room. About the middle of the night the bed bugs would come out of the seams of the mattress and bite us. We all woke up with spots of blood all over the mattress and we would declare war on them. They were about the size of ticks and we could mash them with our thumb nails and our blood would squirt out. It was a way of life then. Have you ever heard 'have a good night, don't let the bed bugs bite'? Everything I have written is true. No one can ever question me on anything I've written.

A couple more little things. From the time we drove up from Georgia until I went to the foster home when I was around fourteen to fifteen, I never knew people actually had a telephone in their house. People always walked to a certain corner to a phone booth and put their nickel in the slot and somebody would say 'number please'. You would tell her and in a little while you would hear it ringing and your party would say 'hello'. They didn't have dials. They came along later. When I went to the foster home I would pick up the phone just to hear 'number please'. What will they think up next? Things were good growing up. We would all walk downtown to Pratt and Light Street and a cop was in the intersection on a six foot pedestal, like a phone booth. He directed traffic by turning this sign that would say 'stop' or 'go'. We would sneak between the hundreds of vegetable and fruit stands like the G. Fava Fruit Vegetable Stores. Like I said we would sneak between them and dive into the harbor and float around for hours on watermelons and cantalopes. All the kids I knew learned to swim there. When you see the inner harbor now you wouldn't believe what it used to be when we were kids. Back then, there were a lot of horses and wagons and trucks. All the streets down there were cobble stone and belgium blocks.

Another thing boys did. Me and Pollock went to the Foreman's Dump to play in the trash piles. Two teenagers were shooting at rats with little 22 rifles and my foot was hurting at my heel. I remember sitting down and taking my tennis shoe and sock off and I could feel the little bullet with my finger. Anyway, the guys came over and popped it out and found a piece of rag and wrapped it. I never did tell my mother. But the dump and the Pig Pen were hard to beat. I can't remember girls doing stuff like that. Another favorite thing in the 'thirties' was on Easter. All the mothers that could afford a dozen eggs would dye them and we would get two or three a piece and you would holler at the top of your lungs 'got an egg', 'got an egg' and you would hear a block away 'got an egg'. You would keep hollering until you could see each other. You would hold yours with the round end up and your opponent would try to tap yours till one of them cracked and then you would switch ends. The guy with both ends broke lost his egg. They called it 'picking eggs'.

One thing I remember, my father would have a club and we would have watermellon



HOME Sweet Home  
Cemetery



parties and go on hikes. I guess that's where I got it from. When I was forty, I had about twenty eight boys in my club. Of course, I had help from my two son-in-laws, Joe and Dave. Meanwhile, back at 'Levertown'. Ray was born, that made five boys and one girl. They had a drug store on the corner and they always had a contest with nice prizes. A little boy a few doors away was killed going to the contest. His name was Allen. I was running between cars and I was knocked down at the same place by a car. The man wanted to take me to the hospital but I just ran home. We went to Patterson Park and we would run and slide across the dance floor on our backs. I was stopped abruptly and when we went home and my mother saw the blood on my shirt. I told her it was ok but she wanted to look for herself. She raised my shirt and said 'Oh my God', we have to go to the hospital. They had to cut me about four inches on my back. The splinter was about six inches long.

One day they carried Junior home because a sled runner went halfway through his leg. Peppy busted his chin wide open when he hit a high manhole cover on a sled. Helen fell down the steps and was knocked unconscious and we thought her neck was broken. Eddy was having epileptic fits. My father died and 'Freddy the wops' father said he was going to burn our house down and kill us all. My mother was sick and had six children and her husband gone. No wonder we packed up and moved to Mura Street. Now we're talking about 1937. That was the year my mother received the bonus from my father's World War One service. Everybody in our neighborhoods were poor but we didn't know it. Everybody always moved to beat the rent man. They didn't have welfare, it was called Relief. There wasn't any work anywhere. The country was in the 'Great Depression'. Anyway, when she got the bonus check, (it was probably \$500.00). I remember we all had to look at the check. It said 'Sara Martin', the unmarried widow of Ira A. Martin. Everybody used coal oil in their stoves. My mother used \$100.00 and bought a gas stove. A dollar bought a new alarm clock. We would take my wagon and go all the way downtown and get white margarine and dry skim milk, potatoes and bags of flour (about 20 pounds). They were called 'food commodities, not to be sold'. At first me and Junior would take the wagon and go all day for cardboard and paper. When we got enough, on Saturdays we took it to the scrap yard. Usually we would make about a dollar, fifty. That was pretty good money. Then Pep started helping. Junior was thirteen, I was twelve and Pep was a little over ten.

Everybody had roaches, mice, and bed bugs. It was a way of life. My mother and Helen and Ray (the baby), slept in the front room and us four boys slept in one bed in the back bedroom. All the houses had four rooms and dirt cellars. On the corner of Mura Street and Collington Avenue was Bolanders Bakery. We would stand outside and watch them make honeydews and I knew someday when I was grown up and working I was going to come back and buy a whole dozen and eat all we wanted.

It's about 1938 now and we moved two block to Hennaman Avenue. We lived at 2210. We didn't know it but this was the beginning of the end. Lots of stuff happened here. About two nights a week, three or four of us would sneak into yards and get Coke and Pepsi bottles. A guy on Milton Avenue had a little store and he would pay us a penny a piece. Sometimes we would get twenty or thirty so you see how that would add up. If we were lucky we would get the High's milk bottles and he would pay us three cents. They were nickel deposit bottles. That started my life of crime. There was me, Fats, Cocky and a young friend named Junior. One night we lifted the little boy about nine years old, up and he went into the top of the door into a barber shop on the corner. He cleaned out the register of three dollars in quarters, and opened the door for us. We all took off and hid and split up the loot. It came to seventy five cents a piece. We were all rich so we bought a whole pack of cheap cigarettes each, soda, cakes and candy. The man that ran the store probably noticed we all paid for our stuff with quarters. The barber was telling the store owner about the big heist. They probably put two and two together and called the police. Needless to say, we were all caught. Our parents had to pay the barber back and we were put on probation for a year and every Saturday we had to clean the barber shop. We found out that crime doesn't pay. So we went back to stealing bottles. We thought that was ok. We weren't all bad, sometimes we would walk all the way to Orangeville off of Monument Street. We would climb the Mulberry trees and eat black mulberries until we were sick or full. We would go to Home Sweet Home Cemetery and play cops and robbers around the tombstones. They told us





Jack Hart.  
Public Enemy #1  
was captured here



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public enemy #1 'Jack Hart' was captured there a few years earlier. The cemetery was all grown over and most of the tombstones were laying down or broken and everywhere wild red roses grew. So most of the people for blocks and blocks had Home Sweet Home Roses growing in their yards. Some red rose bushes probably still grow their.

FOOZIE

One of the biggest things for kids in the thirties was to go to Sheep Hill Park on Preston Street and shoot marbles. I think they changed the name to Collington Square. Before I forget it, the corner store on Biddle Street would sell coal by the bag. The red bags were 17 cents and the black bags were 21 cents. They were checkered colored. Soft coal 17 cents and hard coal 21 cents. The bags of coal were like two big rolls of paper towells, one on top of the other. Of course money never changed hands, because everybody and the store owners would mark in the little books and pay the first of the month when the relief checks came in. It was called 'buying on tick'. Everybody did it. My mothers health was going downhill. But we didn't realize it because we were kids and she never complained about anything. She only wanted to keep the family together. We never told our mother that me, Pep and Junior were revived after all three of us drowned in a clay quarry behind Continental Can Co. She had enough to worry about and this would probably have killed her. A big tall guy named Buzzie Fry waded up to his neck and pulled us up and out of the muddy water. I don't know how long we threw up before we could breathe and carry on. I also drowned and was revived under a log jam at Herring Run Park when I was fourteen.

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It's a little fuzzy to me now, but there came a time when they took my mother away. Of course Ray was about two or three so she took him with her. She was taken to Eudowood Sanitarium with lung disease. Probably pleurisy or T.B. That left Junior, me, Pep, Eddy and Helen. I don't remember how many weeks we lived alone. The next door neighbor would send some food over sometimes. Later on a woman from the State would come and make elbow macaroni. The authorities called me James instead of Brother, but I found out and could change it to Jim. I liked that better. One time the people from the 'Aid Society' came and took us the 'The Avenue' to a special shoe store. It was called 'Thom McCanns' and we were fitted with wingtips. It was a lot different from out 34 cents tennis shoes. Then they bought us each a pair of new pants. They held them up and said they were ok. What did me and Eddy know, we never had new pants before. Anyway, the girl next door was having a birthday party and I was invited. Usually girls never had anything to do with the 'Henry Watson Children'. The person that ran our house could sew. Sometimes she was real nice. She even taught me to iron white shirts for the male boarders. She had me try on my new green pants. The length was a little long, but the waist was about 36 and I was about 31 or 32. So what she did was put the back together, flip in and sew it down the back. That made the bottom stick out about four inches. It looked like I had a load in my pants. Thats the only way I can say it. You know when you get new clothes you want to walk around and let people see you. The birthday girl must have seen me walking. Just the day of the party she said, and I have never forgotten it to this day. She said are you going to wear your 'green pants' and I said 'yes'. I thought she thought I looked good but through the years I realized she was ashamed of me in front of all her friends. Its ok, because she wasn't that much anyway. Going back to Hennaman Avenue. Clean up and leave. We were alone until the next supper. To be fair I remember there were times she would make a sandwich for lunch for us and listen to a ballgame with her feet up on a chair. We thought we were all being treated good, we didn't have to come in or get up. We could get up when we wanted to. There wasn't any school because it was summer. Then one day the big black cars came. It was early morning so we were all home. First, one of them took Junior away. Months later I found out they put him in Maryland Training School for bad boys. The next one they took was Eddy and put him in 'Rosewood' (a mental institution). Then they took Peppy and Helen to the Miracle House on the eastern shore near St. Michael's. From there they went to foster homes. Helen on Fulton Avenue and Pep up to Rising Sun in Cecil County. I was placed in a boarding home with four other boys. I won't ~~24~~ tell you where it was. We were all split up and we were all abused as kids. I don't think they ever got to Junior because he never did take any crap from anybody. Remember him fighting with 'Freddy the W--', but there were others. He got out of Maryland Training School and they put him in the boys home on Linden Avenue. To get out of there he joined the Navy. He was killed



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in a navy plane less than a year later. The war was on and I think it was late in 1942. A few years later my mother came out of the hospital and some of us got back together. 'Junior - Navy', 'Me - Army', 'Pep - Army', Ray - Navy'.

Like I said, everybody had an ice box and each family had a sign about the size of your window pane. Depending on how you hung it in the window and turned it four different ways would show what size you wanted. You could get a 5 cent, 10 cent, 15 cent or 20 cent piece. We always got the 5 cent piece and the 10 cent piece on the weekend. But when the winter came, everybody had a window box outside and didn't need ice. But with six kids we never heard of left overs. Sometimes we would have watered, powdered milk. A guy would come around with something that looked like a wheelbarrow, but when he stopped and turned it over he could pedal it and sharpen household knives for a nickel. Sometimes an organ grinder would come and a little monkey would go around an beg and collect pennies. 'Make a buck', 'make a buck'. Remember one more thing, if you ever go to visit some old person with alzheimer's and he doesn't talk or even know you're there and he seems to have a little smile on his face, maybe he's remembering when he was a kid during 'The Great Depression' 1929 - 1940. So go on back home - he's ok.

If I had a computer chip instead of a brain, I wouldn't have to jump back an forth with my early years. When Junior and I were nine and ten, we ran away with a carnival. We both worked next to each other. People would try to knock down the wooden milk bottles. Junior handled that and I worked where they would try to knock down the dolls. Night after night the song 'Begin The Beguine' played all the time. It was probably written about that time. I don't remember how long we stayed with them and I can't remember how we got back to Baltimore. They paid us in food and drink sometimes. Along those years me and Junior went to 'The Miracle House' where Pep and Helen went about four years later. Sometimes it wasn't bad and sometimes it was terrible. It was probably a month later when Junior ran away and hid in the swamps. It was pretty far down there and you went by ferry boat. There weren't any bay bridges then. They found him with the dogs and brought him back. When I think back, I think of Paul Newman being brought back in 'Cool Hand Luke'. You won't believe what Junior's punishment was. In front of about fifty boys they made him take his pants down and bend over a chair. Then they picked me out of a crowd and made me beat him about ten times with my bare hand. They kept telling me 'harder', 'harder'. I couldn't write this if it wasn't true. All the boys and girls were separated, we never had any contact with them. We didn't have any women on our side. We had men counselors and I guess some were ok. I won't say much more about that summer. Jumping ahead to me at a foster home a few years later. They brought Eddy out of Rosewood to live with me. Me and Eddy ran away - hopped a freight train and tried to make it to 'Father Flannagan's Boys Town' in Omaha, Nebraska. Well we didn't make it. We ended up in Newport News, Virginia. The police brought us back, but we weren't punished. The Henry Watson childrens aid society paid our board at the foster home. When I went to work full time in a body and fender shop I was making eight dollars a week. I had to pay four dollars for me and three dollars for Eddy every week. I was fifteen now. We had a dollar to spend on a movie and candy. Sometimes me and Eddy would go from bar to bar and Eddy would go in first and say can I sing you a song for a penny and I would peep in and see him singing and I would come in and tap and dance. Some sundays we could make two to three dollars that way. Then one day Eddy had two or three seizures so they came and took him away. I think they took him back to Rosewood. They never told me.

I wanted to change jobs but first I had to get a work permit because I was still fifteen. To work at Hutzler Brothers Department Store you had to be at least sixteen. Anyway, I worked there until I was seventeen. I tried to join the Navy on my birthday but I learned I was color blind and I never knew that. They I got a job with the shipyard working with asbestos on Liberty Ships. I remember on labor day, 1942 they launched the 'John Brown' and its still floating today in the Baltimore harbor. I stayed there into early 1943 and then I learned my brother Junior was killed in Fentress, Virginia in a military plane accident. I've never gotten over that, to this day. Somewhere in about the middle of the year I met the love of my life during an air raid warning. She and my sister, Helen and us guys ran into our house because the streets had to be cleared. The war was still going strong and we were subject to being bombed by enemy planes. Anyway she was fifteen and shaking



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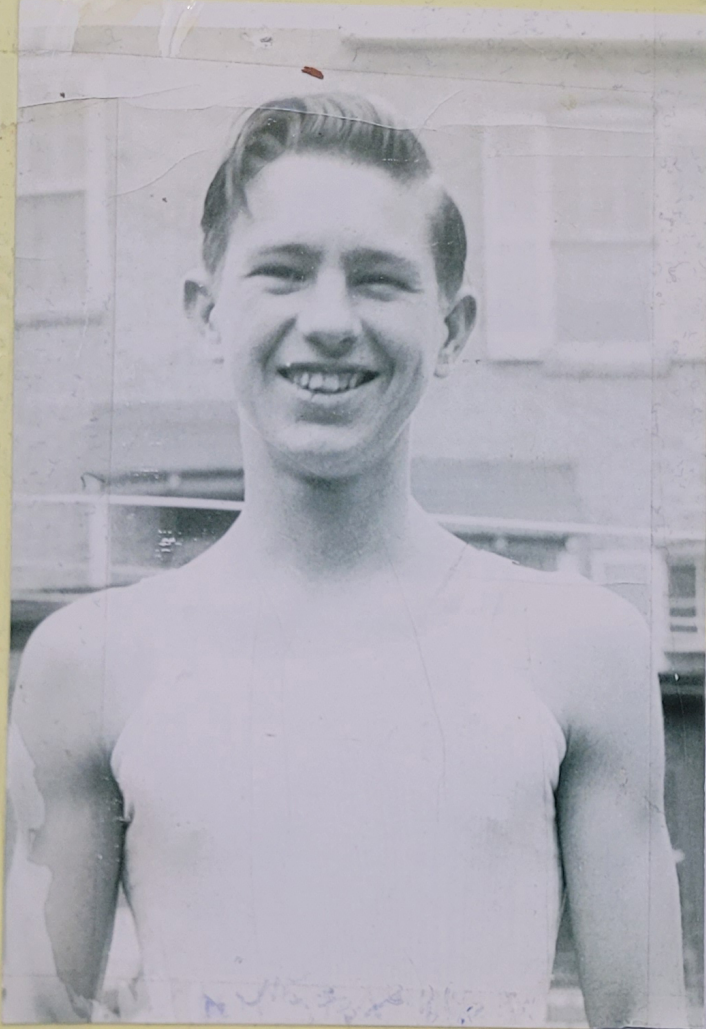
and I put my arm around her. Now, sixty four years later I still put my arm around her.

Jim 'Brother Martin'

Dad died - Mom died - Junior died - Eddy died - Helen died - Ray Died 8-5-09

I just learned on the History Channel  
Today Dec. 5 is the 75<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary of the end of Prohibition  
Dec 5<sup>th</sup> 1933.  
I was 8 years old.  
Jim





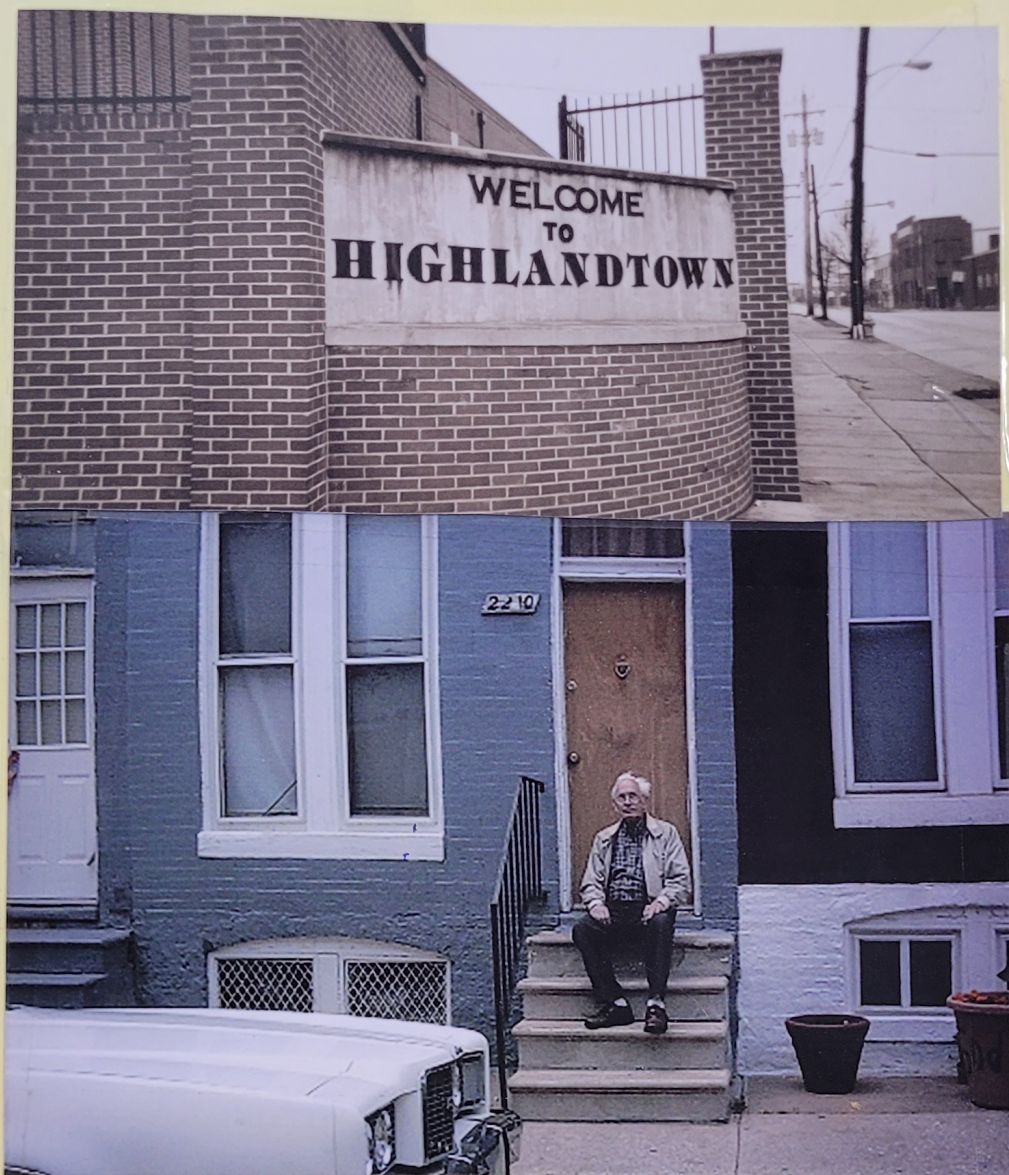
Jim ~~St.~~  
1941

Until I was 16  
My name was  
"Brother Martin"



Jim ~~St.~~  
1945





The last House we lived in as  
a Family 1938 + 39  
Pep sitting on Steps at  
2210 Henneman Ave

The Houses were Eleven Ft. wide  
With a total of Four Rooms ~~at~~



Roses Drew  
(Home Sweet Home)  
in  
'Cemetery'



Our Last Street  
Henneman Ave